LYSANDRA CORMION, A NEW EUROPEAN BUTTERFLY

By V. Nabokov

This peculiar insect is best described in terms of relation to *Lysandra coridon* Poda and *Polyommatus meleager* Esp. Roughly speaking, it is more like the former above, and more like the latter below. Its expanse is that of a slighly undersized *coridon.*

The upper side is a clear silky blue, comparable to the bluest varieties of *coridon* (and recalling yet another species, *Polyommatus eros* O.). Next to it *meleager* looks purplish and *coridon* silvery gray. The dark fuscous border of the primaries is broader than in *meleager;* less sharply defined than in *coridon.* The fringes belong to the double (*meleager*) type, with the inner line a pale fuscous on the fore wing, but unlike *meleager*'s they are slightly checkered. The secondaries while rounder than in *coridon,* and with a whiter abdominal fold, do not suggest *meleager*'s ample contour; they have their subcostal vein curved in the *coridon* manner, *i.e.,* more arched than it is in *meleager,* and display a submarginal row of conspicuous black dots (that are generally wedge-shaped in *coridon* and absent in *meleager*).

On the under side, as in *meleager,* the primaries lack the two basal spots found in *coridon,* but the first one of the submedian row seems advanced basally—a *coridon* feature. There is a *Lysandra*-like difference in tone between the wings; but the light tint of the primaries is of the *meleager* (whitish) shade, and this tint is merely deepened to a dunnish gray on the secondaries without any admixture of buff so frequently seen in *coridon.* All the ocelli are neatly accentuated, with their white rings especially distinct on the darker hind wing. This has a clear median streak (indiscernible in most males of *meleager* owing to the general bleached effect of the under side); the submarginal chevrons show no trace of orange, but are rather more strongly outlined than in *meleager,* and the base of the wing is dusted with metallic blue.

An examination of the genitalia reveals that the ædeagus of *cormion,* with its bulblike enlargement just before the tip, closely resembles that of *coridon* and has nothing to do with the elongated form and bottleneck terminal process seen in *meleager* and other *Polyommatus* species. In *cormion* this organ appears to be just a trifle thinner and its swelling rather less accentuated than is the case with *coridon;* but there can be no question of its forming any intermediate between *coridon* and *meleager:* it is quite unmistakably of the *Lysandra* type. On the other hand, the more perfectly rounded hump of the vinculum, the deeper notch beneath the terminal spur of the harpé and the irregular, less solid looking structure of the uncus seem to differ from the corresponding parts of *coridon* in a way approaching *meleager.*

The only two specimens known (holotype and paratype, both now in The American Museum of Natural History) are males and were taken by me on the 20th and 22nd of July, 1938, at an altitude of about 4,000 feet on the flowery slopes above Moulinet (Alpes Maritimes, France), a place seldom visited by collectors though famed since Fruhstorfer's time for some remarkable "*Lycæna*" races (and the type locality of his *escheri* var. *balestrei* and *amandus* var. *isias*). Both specimens were netted because they looked so different on the wing from the rest of the "blues" present, and during the next two days I saw two more (or a third one twice) which I missed, bungling being encouraged by a strong wind and the steepness of the ground. Suitable females were also looked for, but in vain; nor did a subsequent search through the rich material of the British Museum yield any additional examples.

Had not the bulk of my collection remained in a basement in Paris, I should have liked to compare *cormion* not only with *coridon,* but with my series of the very closely allied *rezniceki* Bart., the Riviera representative of a Spanish species. I feel a puzzle here. Apart from the link hinted at by *cormion,* there seems to exist a curious mimetic affinity between *meleager* and the "*coridon*" group, thus the pale under side of sturdy *albicans* H.S. bears a striking resemblance to that of *meleager,* especially when, as often happens in the former's case, the fulvous fillings are greatly reduced.

There is also the question of interbreeding. Some of the "blues" have been suspected of unconventional pairings, and in connection with *meleager* one may mention that Rebel described and figured (Verh. zool. bot. Ges. Wien, v. 70, *meledamon*) a *Polyommatus*-like *Agrodiætus* captured in 1919 in the vicinity of Vienna, which he assumed to be—with wholly unwarranted precision—a cross between *meleager* male and *damon* female. In the present case where *meleager* and *coridon* are examined it would be likewise poor science to suppose that *cormion,* not being a plausible mutation of either, ought to be the offspring of both. The powers responsible for the moulding of Mediterranean *Lycænidæ* seem to be in a state of hectic activity, issuing new forms by the hundred, some of which may be fixed and retained by the secret decrees of nature, others dismissed and lost the very next season. Whether *cormion* will have to be deemed the freakish outcome of such evolutionary gropings which fashioned a few specimens in the season of 1938, never to bring out that particular make again, or whether it will turn up here and there, to struggle for elbow room between *coridon* and *meleager,* somewhat in the way *thersites* does between *icarus* and *escheri,* is a matter for the future to settle. Personally I would have postponed describing this rarity were I ever likely to revisit its lovely haunts.

In conclusion, my thanks are due to Mr. W. P. Comstock of The American Museum of Natural History for so very kindly placing all available material at my disposal and dissecting for me the genitalia of the three insects involved.